

FRANK CORTI Interview
by Bruce Pierini
Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey Project
February 24, 1984

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic</u>
0:00	Introduction
0:30	Frank's parent's Italian origins. Father emigrated at 16. Mother was an orphan who learned sewing in a convent orphanage. Frank's mother became a protégé of an Italian Countess Magliani.
2:20	Countess Magliani asked Frank's mother if she would like to remain here in America (Alameda).
3:00	Frank's father landed in New York in 1906. He worked as a truck gardener in South San Francisco among the Italian colony there.
3:25	Frank's father became a produce salesman in San Francisco in the nineteen teens.
4:45	Frank's father Giulio played the mouth harmonica and he learned to play the violin and earned the nickname "Violino."
5:20	Giulio went to work at an Italian grocery store.
5:48	Mother became the personal maid of Mrs. Rufe.
6:09	His parents met ca. 1914 and married in early 1915.
6:40	"Cow Hollow" area of San Francisco is where his parents met and began their married life together.
7:30	Genoese and Tuscan rivalries in business in San Francisco are described.
7:56	Frank was born June, 1916.
8:15	Frank and his brother Gino were newspaper carriers for the Call and Examiner as young men ca. 1931-2.
9:28	Frank worked about six years for Safeway as a store manager. He left there and went to work for Best Foods in 1939.

FRANK CORTI Interview
Index - page 2

- 10:23 Frank moved to Sacramento in 1941 with his family. Best Foods had sent him here alone for fourteen weeks the previous year as a Supervisor.
- 11:38 Rose Corti like the weather in Sacramento -- a pleasing contrast to foggy San Francisco.
- 13:00 Frank felt opportunity here. He had a good feel for the grocery business. In October 1946 Best Foods offered him a job in Honolulu and elsewhere but he and his family had already put down roots in Sacramento.
- 14:20 Meda Brothers Italian Grocery was available for purchase. Frank and Gino looked at it and felt Sacramento could support a store like the one they had in mind. Nobody had yet filled that niche.
- 15:15 Meda Brothers was on 8th and J and probably the best known of the Italian groceries.
- 16:00 Mentions other Italian grocery stores: Progress Grocery near the Public Market was run by Louie Carissimi; Mazzucchi Brothers was by the SP depot and a very old Italian grocery. Pennisi bought Progress Grocery and called it Pennisi's.
- 17:25 Arata family had been in Jackson in the Gold Rush. They were retailers from around the turn of the century in Sacramento. They became wholesalers here in 1920s. Arata's were very aggressive and extremely successful.
- 18:54 "Grandpa" Genovino had a store on 57th and H Streets. The Genovino brothers opened their store on 26th and J.
- 19:35 Meda Brothers and Mazzucchi Brothers were the most traditional Italian bulk grocers.
- 20:20 Frank lists the regional origins of the various grocers. Most were northern Italian.
- 21:25 There was a San Francisco wholesale connection to these various Italian groceries: Giurlani, Monteverde, Parodi and others.

FRANK CORTI Interview
Index - page 3

- 22:40 Selling to regional Italians here in Sacramento. Many Neopolitans and Abruzzesi at the time. Some similarities in bulk merchandise. Meda, Mazzucchi and Carissimi tended to carry more of the traditional Italian items and hence get more of their business.
- 24:20 There were many Yugoslavs and Greeks who shopped at the early store. Southern Italians and Sicilians as well shopped there. All of these people's food preferences in olive oil, cheeses, etc. were somewhat similar.
- 26:20 Many ethnic men came alone or with their wives to do their shopping.
- 27:15 During the 1940s and presently people come regularly to Corti Brothers from as far away as Lake Tahoe, Redding, Stockton, Fairfield and Suisun.
- 28:07 Tuscans (many Lucchesi) farmers in the Delta used to come to Corti's during the off-season. During the regular agricultural season, San Francisco food distributors would sell provisions directly to them in the delta.
- 28:45 The Italian San Francisco food wholesalers were important men. Particularly powerful was Mr. Giurlani.
- 30:02 END Side A
- 0:00 Arata Brothers were comparable wholesalers of groceries here in Sacramento.
- 0:34 Arata Brothers in Oak Park did business directly with farmers. Aratas would often partly barter with these farmers of various ethnic groups. They became one of the largest volume grocers in the whole area. It was called Valley Wholesale and was on 34th and Broadway.
- 2:50 Description of Andrew Arata and his running "double-truck" ads in Sacramento Bee before it was popular.

FRANK CORTI Interview
Index - page 4

- 3:54 Frank describes Andrew Arata as not keeping up with the times.
- 4:26 The Arata family's role in helping Corti Brothers get started ca. 1949.
- 6:19 Arata's made it easy for Corti's to take over the old Arata Brothers store at 3195 Folsom Blvd. near the Rosemount Grill.
- 7:50 Corti Brothers began as a family business. Wife Rose began the catering business at Corti Brothers in 1951 and worked through until about 1978.
- 9:50 There were major changes in how the business had been run since about 1950. There is more sophistication in how they do business.
- 11:07 Second and third generation eat differently than the first among most ethnic groups.
- 12:15 Corti Brothers growth from the Arata Brothers building on Folsom Blvd.
- 12:48 The store at 59th and Folsom became available and in April 1970 they purchased it.
- 14:50 They had opened a small store on Arden Way in 1964. It was enlarged in 1972.
- 15:20 The Crossroads store opened in the early 1970s as well.
- 16:00 They opened the Birdcage Walk store in 1976.
- 17:00 The Cort-Yard store was a problem with merchandise.
- 17:25 Corti Brothers bought the Cort-Yard in 1979 and opened the Corti Brothers store there in November, 1981.
- 17:50 Corti Brothers did \$1,300,000 at 32nd and Folsom in 1970. From 1970 through 1980 Corti Brothers did almost \$27,000,000.
- 18:50 Corti Brothers uniqueness at 8th and J in the late 1940s was: advertising and promotion in a certain style;

FRANK CORTI Interview
Index - page 5

- 18:50 (con't.) Cheese tasting wasn't usually done but they began this as a customary form of advertisement; They tried to be orderly with bulk items; They increased the "personality" of the store; they merchandised liquor and wine.
- 21:00 Corti Brothers, Carissimi and Mazzucchi Brothers began to realize they had to branch out into the non-Italian, non-ethnic market.
- 22:20 Rose Corti's trays impressed non-Italians and they began trying new foods.
- 23:05 Description of difficulty of selling produce.
- 24:14 Future plans: The family might open one more store. Frank Corti does not see Corti Brothers becoming a large chain. He sees them selling the Cort-Yard and becoming a tenant there. He feels Sacramento is growing and could support a few other Corti stores in certain areas.
- 27:47 Corti Brothers food business is multi-ethnic now, not just Italian. Frank sees their business as being much more international in selections.
- 29:00 Mr. Velo runs the Italian Importing Company on 20th and J. Frank contrasts Corti's style with Italian Importing Co. Feels Italian Importing Co., for one example, also changes people's eating habits.
- 30:10 Describes other large grocery stores. Is pleased that his old employer, Safeway, is now imitating Corti Brothers' style.